Published and Copyright (c) 1999 - 2012
All Rights Reserved

Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Fred Horvat

To subscribe to A-ONE, change e-mail addresses, or unsubscribe, log on to our website at: www.atarinews.org and click on "Subscriptions".
OR subscribe to A-ONE by sending a message to: dpj@atarinews.org and your address will be added to the distribution list.
To unsubscribe from A-ONE, send the following: Unsubscribe A-ONE
Please make sure that you include the same address that you used to subscribe from.

To download A-ONE, set your browser bookmarks to one of the following sites:

http://people.delphiforums.com/dpj/a-one.htm
Now available:
http://www.atarinews.org

Visit the Atari Advantage Forum on Delphi!
http://forums.delphiforums.com/atari/

=~=~=~=

A-ONE #1408 02/24/12

~ No Web for Kim Dotcom! ~ People Are Talking! ~ Tough Times for HP!
~ Woman Must "Unlock" HD! ~ Online Apology or Jail! ~ PS Vita Ad Campaign!
~ Digital Games Institute ~ Socials Are Less Social ~ Twitter Addiction?

-* White House & Online Privacy *-
-* EU Seeks Global Copyright Opinion! *-
-* FCC Urges Web Companies To Safeguard Web! *-

=~=~=~=

->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Another weekend, and another snowstorm bullet missed here in the Northeast! According to a recent news/weather report, this has been the second warmest winter on record, and a near record-setting season for lack of snowfall. And folks like me are doing the "dance of joy" in celebration for such a mild season!

Well, talking about the weather is certainly a better distraction from everything else going on in the world, and our part of it. Politics is in full gear as far as the Republicans are concerned; and the Democrats are probably enjoying the distractions from their own misdeeds these days. But on the plus side, we have videos of the president singing the blues! Only in America!

It’s getting more and more expensive to purchase the essentials to live these days. Gasoline prices are rising, heating oil prices have sky-rocketed, food prices going up, and the cost of living wages are simply stagnant! What a wonderful time to be alive!

Speaking of wonderful, let’s progress right into this week’s issue and get our minds off of the mundane issues of today!

Until next time...

=~=~=~=

->In This Week’s Gaming Section - $50 Million PS Vita Advertising Campaign!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Summer Innovation Program!

=~=~=~=

->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Sony Starts $50 Million PS Vita Advertising Campaign With "World is In Play"

Sony is all in on the Playstation Vita. I ve previously written about why I think the Vita is going to have a very tough time competing in the broader electronics market, but Sony just reaffirmed its commitment to the gaming handheld to the tune of a $50 million advertising campaign, according to a New York Times report.

Writes the Times:

> The theme of the campaign, "Never Stop Playing," will be featured on many of the ads as will the Twitter-influenced hashtag, #gamechanger.
>
> Jason Elm, the executive vice president and creative director at Deutsch, described the campaign s audience as "very socially plugged in, mobile, out and about, both physically and on the Internet." Using the Twitter hashtag on the ads would help aggregate all of the conversations people were having about the product in one place, Mr. Elm said.

The campaign kicked off with "The World is In Play," and from the looks of it a good portion of those advertising dollars went to production values. It also looks like Sony is taking a European focus, both from the accents and the soccer game.

Like with the Playstation 3, Sony is gunning for a hardcore gaming audience that can t stop playing complex games with crisp graphics no matter where they are. They ve got steep competition, not just from the Nintendo DS but from smart phones and tablets as well. The mobile market is a lot tougher to crack than it was when the PSP was released in 2005, but Sony has made it clear that it is sure going to try.

Massachusetts Digital Games Institute to Launch Summer Innovation Program Providing College Students the Opportunity To Develop & Market Video Games

Thursday the Massachusetts Digital Games Institute (MassDiGI), based at Becker College, announces a new program for college and university students who are looking to break into the interactive entertainment industry. The MassDiGI Summer Innovation Program gives eligible students the chance to work on the winning video game concepts resulting from the MassDiGI Game Challenge competition being held April 13-15. The Summer Program will kick off in May 2012, and the application process will run from March 15 - April 30. Students can learn more about the program at www.MassDiGI.org.

Students participating in the Summer Innovation Program will work on a game prototype from the ground up with the help of industry mentors and alongside a team of other students on the campus of Becker College in Worcester, Mass. Students entering their junior or senior year at any regionally accredited four-year college or university program are eligible to apply, starting on March 15. Students accepted into the program will receive free housing over the summer, as well as a weekly stipend to cover expenses.

"The MassDiGI Summer Innovation Program is not just another internship, but really provides aspiring students with everything they need to get

involved in the video game industry," said Robert E. Johnson, Ph.D., president of Becker College and chair of the MassDiGI Advisory Board. "We are pleased to host this new program at Becker College and to welcome students from a variety of colleges and universities to our campus this summer."

"One of the founding principles of MassDiGI was to support higher education institutions and game companies as we work across academia, industry, and government to better prepare graduates for careers in the digital games space," said Lieutenant Governor Timothy P. Murray. "As we work towards reaching this goal, the MassDiGI Summer Innovation Program will help connect digital games professionals with educators and students in an academic setting to foster greater collaboration, helping students and companies thrive in Massachusetts."

The MassDiGI Game Challenge (#digichallenge) and Summer Innovation Program are sponsored by Penny Arcade, Microsoft, Hitpoint Studios, Research in Motion, Muzzy Lane, Mass Technology Leadership Council, and Lycos/Gamesville. For more information about MassDiGI, the Summer Innovation Program, or to register for the April 13-15 Game Challenge event visit www.MassDiGI.org.

The Massachusetts Digital Games Institute (MassDiGI) is a statewide center, designated by the Commonwealth, for academic cooperation, economic development, and job creation in the Massachusetts digital games cluster. Based at Becker College, MassDiGI is the result of innovative collaboration among academia, state government, and industry, aimed at fostering the growth of the creative economy in Massachusetts. In addition, MassDiGI is a U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA) University Center.

Since starting up, MassDiGI has launched several initiatives that support entrepreneurship and enhance the talent pipeline between higher education and the digital games industry. Specific initiatives include the Reverse Sabbatical Program and the Virtual Production Lab - both of which bring student teams, faculty, and industry professionals together to work on creative projects in a real game development environment. Numerous other initiatives, including the MassDiGI Game Challenge and Summer Innovation Program and those that focus on STEM/K-12 education and industry data gathering/benchmarking, will also be rolled out in 2012.

=~=~=~=

A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

White House Unveils Plan To Protect Online Privacy

The White House on Thursday proposed a "bill of rights" that would give consumers greater online privacy protection and could eventually give the government greater powers to police Internet firms such as Google Inc and Facebook.

While the privacy bill of rights does not impose any immediate new obligations on online companies, President Barack Obama said it was part of a broader plan to give Americans more control over how their personal data was used on the Internet.

"American consumers can’t wait any longer for clear rules of the road that ensure their personal information is safe online," said Obama.

"As the Internet evolves, consumer trust is essential for the continued growth of the digital economy. That’s why an online privacy Bill of Rights is so important."

Internet giants such as Google and Facebook have been accused of quietly tracking their customers’ online activities and then using that data to generate advertising revenue.

Lawmakers have expressed an interest in cracking down on online tracking, but have done little to curtail the practice.

Internet companies have tried to get ahead of reforms by adopting privacy policies, but have still come under fire from Congress and consumer groups for not being upfront about how they use information on users’ online activities.

The U.S. Commerce Department will work with companies and privacy advocates to develop "enforceable" privacy policies based on the bill of rights, said the White House.

While advertising networks associated with Internet firms including Google, Yahoo! Inc and Microsoft Corp have agreed to act on "Do Not Track" technology on web browsers that make it easier for consumers to control tracking.

The Digital Advertising Alliance, a self-regulatory body representing media and marketing trade associations, said on Thursday it would immediately begin work to add these browser-based choices to the set of tools consumers can use to express their preferences for data collection.

Stu Ingis, the group’s general counsel, said he expected within nine months for browsers to include a simple, clear mechanism for consumers to opt-out of all data collection.

The administration said it was highlighting this action by online advertisers as an example of the kind of progress that can be made through voluntary action.

Obama’s announcement comes as he hones his strategy for winning re-election in November. Obama is holding himself up as a champion of everyday Americans who does not impede the business community’s contribution to economic growth.

The planned privacy bill of rights consists of seven basic protections consumers should expect from companies.

Consumers would have control over the kind of data companies collect, companies must be transparent about data usage plans and respect the context in which it is provided and disclosed. Companies would have to ensure secure and responsible handling of the data and be accountable for strong privacy measures.

The bill of rights also calls for reasonable limits on the personal data that online companies can try to collect and retain and the ability of consumers to access and ensure the accuracy of their own data.

While companies can voluntarily choose whether to adopt these principles, those that do commit could face enforcement action for straying from the principles.

Federal Trade Commission Chairman Jon Leibowitz said a failure to meet privacy commitments once adopted could be a deceptive act or practice, warranting FTC fines or other action.

Still, he expected companies to come on board as strong privacy protections encourage trust in Internet commerce. "That in turn fuels growth of the cyber economy and all other uses of the Internet," Leibowitz said.

The FTC issued a draft privacy report in December 2010 that called for more privacy by design, choice and transparency. A final report is expected soon.

FCC Urges Internet Companies To Safeguard Web

Internet service providers need to work harder to prevent hacks, data theft and other fraud, including contacting customers whose infected computers have been hijacked by organized crime and helping them clean out viruses, the head of the Federal Communications Commission said on Wednesday.

FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski said he sought "smart, practical, voluntary solutions" to the massive problem of Internet fraud and data theft. He estimated that 8.4 million credit card numbers are stolen online each year.

Policymakers are eager to prevent security problems and subsequent bad publicity from slowing the growth of the Internet market, worth about $8 trillion a year.

"If consumers lose trust in the Internet, this will suppress broadband adoption and online commerce and communication, and all the benefits that come with it," Genachowski said in a speech.

In addition to helping customers whose computers have been pulled into a botnet, a network of computers used to send spam aimed at committing fraud, Genachowski urged network owners to adopt standards to ensure that Internet traffic goes through the most efficient route and to prevent any hijacking.

That step would presumably prevent a repeat of a 2010 incident where some 15 percent of Internet traffic was diverted through Chinese servers for about 18 minutes, said Genachowski.

The reason for the diversion, whether an innocent mistake or cyber espionage, has never been established.

Lastly, Genachowski urged Internet providers to adopt a system called

DNSSEC to ensure that if an Internet user, for example, types the Internet address of their bank that they will go to their bank's web site rather than a fraudulent web site designed to steal passwords.

Comcast, which already contacts customers who have been pulled into botnets and which already uses DNSSEC, praised the chairman's speech.

"To be effective, everyone who is a part of the Internet ecosystem must play a meaningful role in ensuring that private and government networks, and personal computers and devices are secured," said Comcast/NBCUniversal President Kyle McSlarrow in a blog posting.

There was no immediate reaction from Verizon or AT&T Inc.

Internet security experts were pleased at the prospect of Internet service providers informing customers when their machines were pulled into criminal botnets, and helping them clean up their machines.

"The notification has to happen in some way. I think it's overdue," said Johannes Ullrich, a cybersecurity specialist at the SANS Institute Internet Storm Center, which monitors threats.

Some of the ISPs found that it was cheaper to notify customers before they telephoned to complain. "If you're infected with malware, your computer is going to be slow. And the first thing they (customers with slow computers) do is call the ISP," said Ullrich.

Dmitri Alperovitch, president of Asymmetric Cyber Operations, said he supported any effort to clear out botnets but said the FCC effort would do little to stop two other major threats: state-supported cyber-espionage, often blamed on China, or securing mobile devices.

Prominent hacking targets have included VeriSign, RSA, an authentication company owned by storage maker EMC Corp, and defense contractors such as Lockheed Martin Corp. Others include web search leader Google Inc, Citigroup bank and exchange operator Nasdaq OMX.

There are other efforts in Washington to ensure the Internet continues to function smoothly.

On Capitol Hill, the Senate is considering a bipartisan bill that requires the secretary of homeland security to designate certain infrastructure like air traffic control as critical and compel steps to defend against hackers.

The U.S. House of Representatives is considering similar legislation.

EU Seeks Legal Opinion on Global Copyright

The European Union's executive said on Wednesday it would refer a disputed global agreement to tackle online piracy to the bloc's highest court to check whether it complies with EU fundamental rights.

The Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement, which also aims to cut trademark theft, sparked protests across Europe this month over fears of online censorship and increased surveillance.

EU members Germany, Slovakia, Estonia, Cyprus and the Netherlands have

refused to sign the agreement on the grounds that it endangered freedom of speech and privacy. Poland, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Latvia have expressed concerns about the agreement's impact.

"This morning, my fellow commissioners have discussed and agreed in general with my proposal to refer the ACTA agreement to the European Court of Justice," EU trade chief Karel De Gucht said.

"We are planning to ask Europe's highest court to assess ACTA's compatibility with the EU's fundamental rights and freedoms, such as freedom of expression and information or that of protection," he told a regular news briefing.

Among other measures, ACTA asks Internet providers to cooperate with national authorities to crackdown on online piracy.

Since talks on ACTA began in Geneva in June 2008, Internet lobbies and health campaigners have rallied against it, saying that overly strict controls of copyright would exclude people from the Internet and prevent developing countries from accessing generic medicines.

The European Commission on Wednesday stood by its decision to ratify ACTA, but said the plethora of complaints against the agreement prompted its decision to refer it to the European court.

"Intellectual property is Europe's main raw material, but the problem is that we currently struggle to protect it outside the European Union. This hurts our companies, destroys jobs and harms our economies," De Gucht said. "ACTA will not censor websites or shut them down."

Bail Rules Prevent Kim Dotcom from Using Internet

Megaupload founder Kim Dotcom made his fortune and even took his name from the Internet, but now he's barred from logging on.

Dotcom, accused by U.S. authorities of facilitating millions of illegal downloads through the file-sharing website, has been ordered not to access the Internet as part of his bail conditions. Another unusual condition: No helicopters can land at his home.

Dotcom was arrested in New Zealand in a high-profile raid Jan. 20 and was released Wednesday. New Zealand court authorities disclosed his bail conditions Thursday after The Associated Press and other media requested the information.

Under the terms of his release, Dotcom may leave his Auckland home only for approved outings such as court appearances and medical appointments. He is banned from contacting three Megaupload colleagues who were also arrested during the New Zealand raid and have also been released on bail pending extradition proceedings.

U.S. authorities have charged Dotcom with racketeering. They say he and his colleagues cheated movie makers and songwriters out of half a billion dollars in copyright revenue while making a fortune for themselves.

Dotcom did not have to post any monetary bond for his bail, a standard policy for New Zealand's district courts. He has an extradition hearing

scheduled for August.

Dotcom was born Kim Schmitz in Germany but legally changed his name.

Tough Times for HP Ahead; Will Investors Wait?

Hewlett-Packard Co. plans to spend years turning itself around as it addresses internal problems and battles broader threats from smartphones and tablet computers.

Investors willing to wait could be rewarded. Its market value is half of what it was about a year ago, and HP could start to improve in the second half of 2012.

It won’t be easy, though.

After all, HP will need to fix itself as the personal-computing industry faces its own challenges, including reduced spending by consumers who are saving up for iPads and other popular devices.

Richard Gardner, an analyst at Citi Investment Research, described HP’s road to recovery as "not a journey for the faint of heart."

After presiding over her first full quarter as CEO, Meg Whitman said Wednesday that she has a good sense of what the company needs to do.

For starters, Whitman said, HP needs to fix its internal operations. The company is unable to turn orders into products quickly enough, and its supply chain is a mess. HP has numerous parts in its inventory, but not necessarily the right parts to fulfill actual orders. The variety also creates confusion in sales and technical support. Whitman said HP needs to invest more in internal systems and procedures.

Longer term, she said, the company needs to spend more money to grow businesses such as security services, information management and Internet-based systems known as cloud computing.

"We didn’t make the investments we should have during the past few years to stay ahead of customer expectations and market trends," Whitman said. "As a result, we see eroding revenue and profits today."

HP reported a 44 percent drop in net income to $1.47 billion, or 73 cents a share, in the November-January period. Revenue was $30 billion, down 7 percent and slightly below forecasts of $30.7 billion. It was the fastest revenue decline for the company since the recession hit 2009 results.

The division that makes PC desktops and laptops saw revenue fall 15 percent to $10.4 million. That’s still about a third of the company’s revenue. A shortage in hard drives because of flooding in Thailand was partly to blame. So was increased competition from mobile devices, which HP quit making last year after losing to Apple and manufacturers using Google’s Android system.

To pay for investments, HP needs to cut costs. Whitman didn’t offer specifics; some analysts foresee "restructuring" - which often means job cuts.

"We have got to save to invest," she said. "We have got to save to grow."

Whitman became CEO in September after HP fired Leo Apotheker just 11 months into the job. Apotheker also complained about underinvestment by his predecessor, yet his decisions hadn't instilled any confidence.

Among other things, Apotheker announced that HP was looking to jettison its PC unit, which has large volume but small profits. That scared off some buyers, who may not have come back when Whitman decided to keep the division.

Whitman pleaded patience as she described "a multiyear journey."

Investors responded by selling shares of HP. The Palo Alto, Calif., company's stock fell $1.89, or 6.5 percent, to close Thursday at $27.05. Its market value of $54 billion compares with $104 billion about a year ago.

Louis R. Miscioscia, an analyst with Collins Stewart, said the stock looks cheap, but a turnaround now seems further away. He noted that IBM Corp., which transformed from a dying PC maker to a leading provider of software and services, had to work hard for more than a half decade to get there.

Nonetheless, he raised his price target on HP's stock Thursday to $28, from $25.

Of course, HP may be intentionally setting expectations low.

Analyst Shaw Wu at Sterne Agee said many investors dismissed Cisco Systems Inc. a year ago, after its focus got scattered from expanding into too many new markets. But the network-equipment maker has reported a few good quarters in a row. The stock is up nearly 50 percent since Aug. 10.

Wu expects HP's revenue decline to start slowing by midyear. That's when supplies of hard drives should rebound. Soon after that, HP could see increased sales from an upcoming release of Microsoft's Windows 8, an operating system that would work similarly on PCs and tablet computers.

If that's the case, a turnaround may happen sooner and reward investors who buy HP's stock now and hang on to it.

"It's tough to count them out," he said. "They have a lot of the ingredients. It boils down to execution. At least they have a game plan in place."

Colorado Woman Must Turn Over Computer Hard Drive

Readily available, easy-to-use software can encrypt a computer hard drive so thoroughly it would take years for a hacker to break in. But that seems to be no impediment for government prosecutors, who have obtained an order compelling the disclosure of a computer's contents in one Colorado case.

It's a case that raises questions about whether requiring someone to unlock a computer's protected files amounts to a violation of the Fifth Amendment's protection against self-incrimination.

The judge's order establishes a "very dangerous precedent that a person

may be forced to assist in her prosecution in a way the law has not seen ever before," said Phillip DuBois, who represents a woman charged in a mortgage and real estate fraud case.

On Tuesday, the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals refused to get involved, saying Ramona Fricosu's criminal case must first be resolved in District Court before her attorney can appeal.

Fricosu, of Colorado Springs, now has until Monday to turn over an unencrypted version of the hard drive of a laptop.

Federal prosecutors argue that not allowing the government access to encrypted computers would make it impossible to prosecute crimes such as terrorism, child exploitation and drug trafficking. The U.S. attorney's office declined to comment on Tuesday's appeals court decision.

The San Francisco-based Electronic Freedom Foundation has opposed the government's actions in the case because it believes easy-to-use encryption software should be used by everybody to prevent computer crimes and fraud, said Hanni Meena Fakhoury, an attorney for the foundation. The case could render those privacy protections useless, he said.

"The government is flipping that on its head and saying encryption is only good for criminals to hide what they're doing," Fakhoury said. "It's very decoder-ring-ish. But this is not some sleuth criminal tool."

A judge last month sidestepped the issue of ordering Fricosu to turn over her password, and instead ordered her to turn over an unencrypted version of the hard drive. Prosecutors had argued the password was like gaining a key to a lock box and other instances where a defendant signs documents to allow investigators to access overseas accounts.

U.S. District Judge Robert E. Blackburn noted that the contents of one's mind is off limits, but he ordered Fricosu to turn over the data, citing a Vermont case that stemmed from a 2006 border crossing search in which a man was later ordered to do the same.

The courts in that case noted that an Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent had found child pornography on the computer but couldn't access it later because of encryption, and turning over the unencrypted hard drive added nothing to the evidence the government already had.

Blackburn also noted there were only a few cases on which to base his ruling.

In Fricosu's case, "the government has no idea what's on that computer," DuBois said. That element makes it different from other cases, he said.

In a procedure agreed upon by DuBois and federal prosecutors, federal agents would meet Fricosu at a designated place with the laptop, which was seized during a search warrant. Then, the government will either look away or go to another room while Fricosu enters a password on her laptop and hands it back to agents so the hard drive can be copied.

But there's a twist.

"It is possible that Ms. Fricosu has no ability to decrypt the computer, because she probably did not set up the encryption on that computer and may not know or remember the password or passphrase," DuBois said in a statement Tuesday.

Fricosu and her husband, Scott Whatcott, are accused of targeting distressed homeowners in the Colorado Springs area. Prosecutors allege the two promised to pay off homeowners' mortgages but then filed fraudulent documents in court to obtain title and sell the homes without paying the outstanding mortgage.

DuBois described Fricosu as an immigrant from Romania who has two sons, no technical expertise in computers and whose computer was encrypted with what he believed was software available on the Internet or at stores.

Encrypted computers are no longer for the technological savvy. With a few clicks of the mouse, readily available 256-bit and 512-bit encryption software makes computer hard drives almost impossible to break into, even for hackers.

"Conceptually, it is possible to break encryption," but it could take years, said Jay Bavisi of the Albuquerque-based EC-Council, a so-called "white hat" and ethical hacker group that tests network and computer security. "It can be a time consuming and resource draining exercise in an already stressed environment."

In one of the few examples of a similar case, a sheriff's detective under suspicion for improper use of a law enforcement database told investigators in King County, Wash., in 2004 that he simply forgot the password to the encrypted portion of his computer hard drive. The detective retired and the computer's hard drive was placed into storage.

"We apparently did not ever crack the code to get in," sheriff's spokeswoman Cindi West said.

Social Networks Getting A Bit Less Social

Users of online social network sites such as Facebook are editing their pages and tightening their privacy settings to protect their reputations in the age of digital sharing, according to a new survey.

About two-thirds, or 63 percent, of social networking site (SNS) users questioned in the Pew Research Center poll said they had deleted people from their "friends" lists, up from 56 percent in 2009.

Another 44 percent said they had deleted comments that others have made on their profiles, up from 36 percent two years before.

Users also have become more likely to remove their names from photos that were tagged to identify them. Thirty-seven percent of profile owners have done that, up from 30 percent in 2009, the survey showed.

"Over time, as social networking sites have become a mainstream communications channel in everyday life, profile owners have become more active managers of their profiles and the content that is posted by others in their networks," the report said.

The Pew report also touches on the privacy settings people use for their SNS profiles. The issue of online privacy has drawn increasing concerns from consumers, and the Obama administration has called for a "privacy bill of rights" that would give users more control over their data.

Fifty-eight percent of those surveyed said their main profile was set to be private so that only friends can see it.

Another 19 percent said they had set their profile to partially private so that friends of friends can see it. Only 20 percent have made their profile completely public.

The report was based on telephone survey of 2,277 adults in April and May 2011 as part of Pew's project on the Internet and American life.

Twitter Addict? Site Founder Wants You To Stop Tweeting and Go Outside

Browsing Twitter can be so much fun that reports indicate some people stay logged in for 12 hours at a time. You may find that hard to believe if you're just a casual user, but Twitter addicts have time-consuming habits that include browsing other people's streams, searching for interesting topics, and trying to make a hashtag trend. If you're an addict who won't listen to friends and family even if they try to stage a Twitter intervention, maybe you'd listen to site co-founder Biz Stone, who finds spending long hours on the site unhealthy.

At a business conference in Canada, Stone was asked what he thought of users who refuse to close their Twitter tabs all day. He answered: "To me, that sounds unhealthy. I like the kind of engagement where you go to the website and you leave because you've found what you are looking for or you found something very interesting and you learned something. I think that's a much healthier engagement." But it's not as if he wants you to barely visit the site either: "Obviously, we want you to come frequently," he added.

Twitter has enjoyed explosive growth over the years and has registered its 500 millionth user recently, though only 1 in every 4 accounts is actually active. A lot of high-profile celebrities including Lady Gaga, President Obama, the Dalai Lama, and even the Pope use the site, so it's not too surprising that more and more people have started using the site, if only to check out what their favorite personalities are up to.

Ohio Man Given Choice of Facebook Apology Or Jail

A man who was threatened with jail time for posting comments about his estranged wife on his personal Facebook page unless he posted daily apologies for a month says the court ruling violates his freedom of speech.

Mark Byron of Cincinnati is making the apology to avoid 60 days in jail, but he plans to appeal the domestic relations court ruling. Byron and free speech and media experts say it should concern other users of the social networking site.

With hundreds of millions of people using Facebook for communication, Byron said Friday that "if they can do this to me, they can do it to others."

The idea "that anybody could tell you what to say to your friends on Facebook should be scary to people," said Cincinnati attorney Jill Meyer, who specializes in free speech and media issues.

The ruling is highly unusual and "troubling because it’s a court telling someone to say something to - in some regards - his chosen group of friends," said Meyer. She noted that the comments were not directed to Byron’s wife, Elizabeth Byron, who was blocked from accessing the page.

According to the ruling, Byron posted comments on his page in November, saying in part, "If you are an evil, vindictive woman who wants to ruin your husband’s life and take your son’s father away from him completely - all you need to do is say you’re scared of your husband or domestic partner and they’ll take him away."

The Byrons are involved in ongoing divorce and child custody proceedings. Byron has said his wife and the court have prevented him from seeing his 17-month-old son many times. The court maintains he is allowed to see him on a twice-weekly basis.

Domestic Relations Magistrate Paul Meyers last month found Byron in contempt of a protective order over his Facebook comments. Meyers said that Byron could avoid a 60-day jail sentence and a $500 fine by posting the apology - written by Meyers - to his wife and all of his Facebook friends and paying her attorney fees.

The June court order prohibited Byron from causing his wife physical or mental abuse, harassment or annoyance. She asked in December that he be found in contempt after learning of the Facebook comments.

Byron’s comments expressed frustration, but they were not threats and he didn’t make them to his wife, said Cincinnati attorney Jack Greiner, who also specializes in free speech and media issues.

Greiner said he doesn’t think the First Amendment "allows a court to find that someone has harassed or caused a person to suffer mental abuse merely by expressing one’s opinion about a court proceeding in a non-threatening way."

Greiner said that a court compelling speech through a court-written apology raises as many free speech concerns as actions prohibiting free speech.

The statement that Byron says he has been posting since Feb. 13 has him apologizing to his wife for "casting her in an unfavorable light" and to his Facebook friends for "attempting to mislead them." Byron said he is being forced to make statements that are false.

The magistrate’s assistant said Friday that Meyers cannot comment on pending court cases. Elizabeth Byron’s attorney did not immediately return calls.

The ruling found that several of Mark Byron’s comments were "clearly intended to be mentally abusive, harassing and annoying" to his wife and "generate a negative and venomous response to her from his Facebook friends."

Responses by Facebook friends to his posting caused Elizabeth Byron to be "afraid and concerned," according to court documents.

Byron and his attorney, Becky Ford, say he made his comments out of

frustration and never expected his wife to see them since she couldn’t access his account.

"Once he made the comments, some of his Facebook friends started making inflammatory comments which he had no control over," Ford said.

His comments were "nothing other than free speech communication where he was venting truthful information," Ford said.

Bryon is scheduled to appear in court March 19 and show proof that he posted the apology or go to jail.

=~=~=~=

Atari Online News, Etc. is a weekly publication covering the entire Atari community. Reprint permission is granted, unless otherwise noted at the beginning of any article, to Atari user groups and not for profit publications only under the following terms: articles must remain unedited and include the issue number and author at the top of each article reprinted. Other reprints granted upon approval of request. Send requests to: dpj@atarinews.org

No issue of Atari Online News, Etc. may be included on any commercial media, nor uploaded or transmitted to any commercial online service or internet site, in whole or in part, by any agent or means, without the expressed consent or permission from the Publisher or Editor of Atari Online News, Etc.

Opinions presented herein are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the staff, or of the publishers. All material herein is believed to be accurate at the time of publishing.